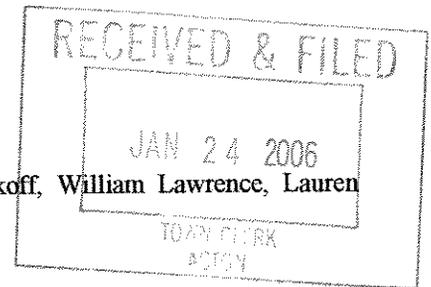


Minutes
Economic Development Committee Meeting
September 15, 2005



Present: Rheta Roeber, Wayne Friedrichs, Phil Janus, Ed Starzec, Herman Kabakoff, William Lawrence, Lauren Rosenzweig, Chris Pappas, Roland Bartl (staff).

Absent: Gary Sullivan, Ann Chang, (one selectmen unfilled).

1) The First item of business was an appointment by Mr. David Duane of Methods Machine Tools, 976 Main Street, Acton. (see attached 2 page presentation). Methods Machine Tools is a family owned business, headquartered in Sudbury, MA who acquired the old Somerville Lumber facility in 1999 as a satellite storage facility. The business acquires machine tools, custom modifies them in Sudbury and ships them to the final purchaser. The Sudbury facility is space limited with no expansion possible due to surrounding wetlands. The Acton business would like to add a 40 ton crane to be able to unload container trucks in Acton. (Currently they have to be unloaded in Sudbury and then trucked back to Acton.) In order to accommodate this crane the building height would need to be raised in the crane section to 38 feet. It is currently 28 feet. Also would like to add on this 50K square foot crane section to existing building to accomplish this without losing current storage space. Current zoning prevents this due to FAR limit (.2) already exceeded (.3 grandfathered under old limits) and height restriction might be a problem also.

General comments:

- Hours of operation are 6:30AM to 3:30PM
- 6:30 - 8AM most unloading occurs due to ship offload schedules
- Trucks come from 495 through Westford down 27—unless from Sudbury facility
- Average 7 trucks a day
- End of month could be 10 trucks per day max
- Crane is 50 ton Electric Crane—would not be heard from outside the building
- Unloading takes place inside the building
- Crane would run on beam from side to side at top of building
- Would need to add supports to building
- Abutters: Kennedy sand and Gravel, Butterbrook Farm, Behind- Cell Tower, Intek—
- Spoken to abutters—no problems anticipated
- Have 330 paved parking spaces—only 4 employees + 16 employees at office tenant -20 car max!
- No wetlands issues anticipated, would convert about 45 parking spaces to 50K sq ft “crane section” of building
- Would be a 2-2.5 million project, mostly in square footage, 250K crane and support structure

Options:

- Zoning Board of Appeals Variance?? Hardship?
- On height—General Industrial “median height requirement” may work but need to check the specific zoning
- Getting rid of some upper level space to lower FAR?
- Zoning changes- possibly create a category “by special permit site plan approval to encourage certain types of businesses” i.e. manufacturing.
- “Revitalization of an underutilized use”
- Consult the Planning Board for other option ideas
- Is there such thing as a ZBA preliminary conference for advice?
- After we check the details would a letter from the EDC to the ZBA help?
- ZBA variance could take up to 6 months
- Zoning change could be pursued at April Town meeting—about 7 months

The EDC was interested in helping Mr. Duane pursue options that would allow this business to remain in Acton. He will advise us on his progress and intentions.

2) The state of the Town Meeting to be held on October 24, 2005 was discussed. One of the two major topics to be discussed is “Economic Development”. RR explained her discussions with Selectmen Ashton on what the EDC role is to be. A five minute presentation is to be given by the EDC as well as the Planning Board and the EDIC. In addition, any printed materials to be in the package for distribution must be submitted to the printer by 10/10/05. A five minute presentation on what the EDC is and does what thought to be to “DRY” and suggestion was made to explain why the topic is a difficult one. RR suggested something along the lines of:

Economic Development in Acton--What do we want? Why?

- Property Tax revenue
- Places to obtain goods
- Places to obtain Services
- Places to accomplish work—offices, manufacturing plants
- Jobs

Concerns:

- Traffic
- Noise
- Taking down trees, filling of open space

Commercial Economic Development is difficult because although everyone would gladly accept an influx of property tax dollars, they might not be willing to accept the other changes that go along with receiving those same dollars. The Town of Acton has many protections in place, and all of them force us to weigh both the benefits and the effects of any commercial development.

Intro- Charter- Purpose-

Examples of EDC Actions:

- 1) Zoning changes w' planning board—i.e. Creation of Technology District
- 2) Enterprise Rental Car—(How many Excise \$ did we actually get?)
- 3) Main Street—should we mention the FAR/crane dilemma? “Good neighbors” that we would hate to lose? Others?
- 4) Commercial database that we are working to set up
 - a. Change in \$ mkt valuation
 - b. Change in sq ft bldg
 - c. Change in sq ft land
 - d. Losses/ gains in each category
- 5) Master Plan Update Section
- 6) Stem losses--? Year and specific zoning change to prevent large undeveloped commercial land losses such as Acorn Park and Farmstead

Other Suggestions to be included:

- Slide of balls being juggled in the air
- Imbalance in ratio of commercial and residential
- Master plan- mixed use
- “What retail would you like to see?”
- Commercial Development tax dollars go almost directly to the bottom line
- “Good Business” vs. any business
- EDC formed because business community complained about the difficulties i.e. the permitting process
 - Protect business
 - Master Plan 1998 noted the increase in the desire for business
 - Zoning became more restrictive (does this mean so residential like Acorn Park cannot be made out of commercially zoned parcels?)
- Generic Policy Level discussion might be good
- Emphasize all the development is done within zoning
- Zoning changes that we worked for with the Planning Board
- Most important was the work done on the 1998 master plan

- Include a copy of the Brochure
- The organizing of the business zoning into more manageable/understandable
- “mixed use” on hold again
- Administrative changes possible—“Staff an office of Economic development”
- How and Why? (Anyone remember this in context?)

RR will put some words together—PJ will put slides together. 3 slides max. Additional EDC Meeting to review presentation on 10/6. Need minutes by 9/28. Need comments for slides by 9/30.

3) Election of new officers. RR called for a vote for new officers, to take effect after the 10/24/05 STM. Ed Starzec was unanimously elected as new Chairman of the EDC. Wayne Friedrichs will remain as Vice Chairman.

4) LR reports that a 40B policy committee is being formed, to develop a policy on how to steer 40B developers. Seems the Draft 40B will encourage developers to look at underutilized commercial space. The thinking behind it is that with the office vacancy rate of 30% some sort of conversions to apartments makes sense. LR will request they add a provision to preserve as much commercial space as a “mixed use” as possible—i.e. retail on the first floor and apartments upstairs.

5) CP passed out copies of the vacancy rates in Acton --Retail, Flex, and Industrial. Although the industrial rate vacancy rate is low—4%, and retail is low about 3%, Flex is about 10%.

6) The recent special use permit request, where a tenant may be required (as a permit provision) to provide sidewalks for his entire building (there are other tenants!) provoked a lively discussion. LR will ask that the EDC be added to the distribution list for all commercial special permits. We can submit comments and just be generally made more aware of the commercial market.

7) The minutes of March 17 were approved as submitted.

Minutes taken by Rheta Roeber